

Ards & North Down - An Agrifood Centre Of Excellence



Conal Stewart (Food and Drink Development Officer), Michele Shirlow (Food NI Chief Executive), Councillor Jennifer Gilmour (Mayor of Ards and North Down) and Colin Neill (Hospitality Ulster Chief Executive).



Echlinville Distillery



Comber Earlies Potatoes PGI status

Home to leading large scale agri-food businesses, field to glass distilleries, and an exciting growing network of high quality and artisan food and drink producers... Ards and North Down (AND) is the location of choice for thriving food and drink companies.

Ards and North Down continues to cement its reputation as a key location for innovative high-quality food and drink producers, growers, manufacturers, processors, restaurants, and independent retailers. It is also gaining a reputation as a quality food and drink destination. The convenient location, strong infrastructure, agricultural acumen, skilled workforce, and collaborative approach to innovation are all key ingredients of its recipe for success!

Agrifood is a key sector in Northern Ireland contributing more than £2M approx. to GVA in Northern Ireland (4.5% of total GVA) in 2021*, and Ards and North Down is the location of choice for a concentration of leading innovators. Accounting for 12.1% of total VAT/PAYE registered businesses, 37.5% of total sales, and 20% of jobs; it is the Borough's 2nd largest employment segments and one of the top sectors for investment. **

AND has been chosen by a host of food and drink businesses including well-known names such as Clondeboy Yoghurt, Echlinville Distillery, Lakeland Dairies (Pritchitts), Mash Direct and Rich Sauces, who are exporting internationally from state-of-the-art facilities in the Borough.

Being adjacent to Belfast, it offers Agrifood companies an excellent logistical solution to support their supply into the international FMCG market. With easy access to Belfast's seaport and the fast road network to Dublin, it is an ideal base for exporters to capitalise on access to wider markets.

HERITAGE, COLLABORATION AND A SKILLED WORKFORCE - THE SECRET SAUCE

From Comber Earlies potatoes (PGI status) and vegetables grown in the rich fertile soils to the unique taste of Portavogie Prawns and oysters from Strangford Lough, the region has long been known for fine produce. This rich heritage, combined with collaboration across the sector, are the foundations for a strong knowledge

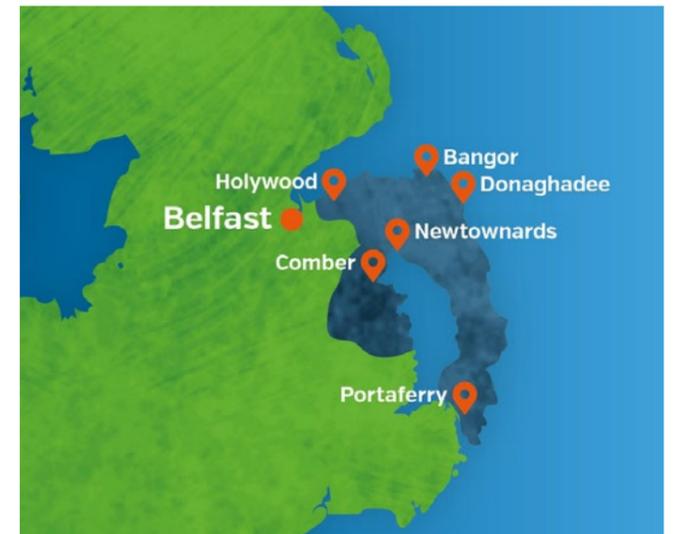
base in agriculture, farming, high-quality large-scale production, and innovation. More generally, the local talent pool is significant with 38% educated to higher levels (NVQ 4+), well above the national average of 34.9%.

AGRIFOOD GROWTH

Ards and North Down is home to a broad range of food and drink businesses many of which have secured deals to supply major retailers across the UK and Ireland. For example, in September 2023 Aldi announced multi-million-euro supply deals with Bangor-based Clondeboy Estate Yoghurt and cross border collective Lakeland Dairies, which has a key facility in Newtownards. The new two-year contract extension with Clondeboy Estate Yoghurts, worth €9.9m (£8.6m), will see the firm continue to supply Aldi's Irish operation but significantly, it will also supply Aldi's operation in Britain for the first time. The deal is expected to drive the Bangor company's sales volumes by 450%. The Lakeland supply deal, worth €15.3m (£13.3m) will see the dairy supply milk and dairy products to Aldi stores across Ireland.

LOCAL INVESTMENT

Ards and North Down is becoming a key location for a cluster of drinks producers who cite local investment and provenance as key drivers of business success. Multi-award-winning distilleries Echlinville on the Ards Peninsula and Copeland Distillery in Donaghadee have both invested in their facilities to create fine spirits which are exported to locations around the world. Echlinville recently purchased the former 'Ards Maltings' building on the outskirts of Newtownards. This £5M plan to restore the malting process on site will facilitate the supply of malted barley to distilleries and breweries on an industrial scale. Echlinville will become the only distillery across NI



and ROI with the capacity to produce, malt, ferment and distil their spirit from field to glass. With traceability at the heart of their product offering, this taps into the fine grain growing and malting heritage of the region to facilitate continued growth.

AWARD-WINNING AND COLLABORATIVE

Ards and North Down really is the place where entrepreneurs creating artisanal products are supported to take an idea at the kitchen table through development to strong retail sales. The pro-business Council offers support, peer networking, and links to sector experts providing an environment to help businesses flourish.

In recent years, Ards and North Down has been successfully establishing itself as a leading food and drink destination, with 67 major awards and accreditations gained by food and drink businesses based in the Borough throughout 2022 and on track to reach a similar number in 2023. Industry collaboration is a critical component of this success. Jack Hamilton from leading producer of Potato and Vegetable Sides, Mash Direct, recently commented that: "The collaborative network from farm to manufacturers to retailers undoubtedly contributes to great food in Ards and North Down."

Ards and North Down Borough Council supports a thriving Taste AND Food and Drink Network. The membership includes representatives from food and drink producers, restaurants, independent retailers, and industry experts who share expertise and industry knowledge.

The Council has just launched its second Food Destination Development Plan (2024-28), which sets out clear and ambitious proposals to position Ards and North Down as a premier food and drink destination locally and nationally. The plan was developed with the input of Taste AND Network members alongside local and national food and drink stakeholders.

Find out more at www.ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk/news/taste-and-a-premier-food-and-drink-destination

Ards and North Down Borough Council - Pro-Business Ethos

Council offers a broad range of support, business training, and funding opportunities to help businesses realise their transformation ambitions. The dedicated business support team is ready to work with investors and can deliver a range of digital innovation, growth, skills, and employability schemes, and provide links to key partners and Government agencies.

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Interested in finding out more about opportunities for business support and investment in Ards and North Down?

Get in touch via email: signaladmin@ardsandnorthdown.gov.uk or call 0300 013 3333.

Find out more at www.ANDBusiness.co.uk

Notes: * Source - Department of Finance

**Source - Invest Northern Ireland

Comber Earlies and distillery images - Copyright Tourism Northern Ireland